

## June 28, 2005: NORTON REBUKES GUN REPEAL ADVOCATES AT HEARING HELD AS PART OF HER EFFORT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 28, 2005

### NORTON REBUKES GUN REPEAL ADVOCATES AT HEARING HELD AS PART OF HER EFFORT TO DRIVE BACK REPEAL

Washington, DC--Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today delivered a strong rebuke to the National Rifle Association (NRA) and congressional sponsors of "the second consecutive attack" on gun safety and Home Rule at a hearing she and Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) organized on the pending repeal. She invited repeal advocates to "show the minimum respect our elected officials deserve by lobbying the appropriate body" and chastised members of Congress for seeking to introduce assault weapons in Washingtonpost 9-11 "while we have checkpoints on our streets, stopping people to see if they are terrorists." Norton called the constitutional rationale for congressional interference "ignorant claptrap from those who have not bothered to immerse themselves in our American history, demeaning [residents] by explicitly classifying them as second class Americans." Norton dared opponents to show that guns in homes would reduce rather than increase gun violence. She said that D.C. children, including 15-year-old Myesha Lowe, whose mother Francine Lowe, testified at the hearing, "deserve better than to have the memory of their young lives besmirched by the repeal of the District's gun safety laws in the very year in which they died by gunfire."

Norton's full statement follows.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing of great importance to D.C. elected officials and residents. I particularly appreciate the collegial conversation between you and me, Mr. Chairman, which resulted in today's hearing and your working with me to select and secure today's witnesses. The current effort to repeal D.C.'s gun safety laws is the second consecutive attack on gun safety and on home rule in as many years, and the fourth attack on our gun laws since I have been a member of Congress, thanks to the National Rifle Association. I want to begin by making an important announcement. National organizations can and do get changes in D.C. laws, but not by coming to Congress. To its credit, Congress, in almost 30 years of home rule, overturned D.C. law only very rarely. Our local laws can be changed the way yours are -- by showing the minimum respect our elected officials deserve by lobbying the appropriate body.

If I may, I want first to note that what is truly amazing about the gun safety repeal bill is that any member of Congress would desire to introduce gun and pawn shops here, which could then sell assault weapons like AK-47s, in the capital of the United States, in the post-9/11 era, while we still have checkpoints in our streets stopping people to see if they are terrorists. Who will take responsibility for a bill that would allow legal ownership of an M-16 by a person who might later go to the roof of an office or apartment building and take aim at federal targets, visitors, and officials? Any security professional will tell you that official Washington has as much to fear from the radical repeal in this bill as residents of the District of Columbia.

My only regret about a hearing on repeal is that any elected official or any police chief of any local jurisdiction in our country today would have to suffer the indignity of appearing before the U.S. Congress on a matter of profound local concern. The most fundamental guiding democratic principle of the founders of our country was local control, first from England and then because they were deeply principled, they denied to the national government that they themselves created any control of the laws of local jurisdictions. The entire reason for our founding revolution was that democracy demanded accountability running from the electorate to those whom they elected. The framers deeply believed that democracy required that the citizens must be able to judge their elected officials by keeping or removing them. No sponsor of this bill could be removed or rewarded by the voters of the District of Columbia, leaving more than 500,000 American citizens stranded and estranged from democracy in their own country. The ignorant claptrap from those who have not bothered to immerse themselves in American history that somehow the root principle of local control and accountability that gave birth to the nation was not meant to apply to citizens living in our nation's capital is a slander on the founders of our country. Even worse, the claim that democracy applies everywhere else in the country but not to the capital of our country demeans the more than half a million American citizens who live in the District of Columbia by explicitly classifying them as second class Americans. Nevertheless, I appreciate that Mayor Tony Williams and Police Chief Ramsey have come to testify as our lead witnesses, and I thank today's other witnesses for their testimony as well. I hope it gives Mayor Williams some comfort in coming here to have a unanimous City Council and a virtually unanimous city behind him as well.

There are two important aspects to this hearing. The first is who has the right and the qualifications to decide the gun safety repeal issue. The second issue is the District's reasons for maintaining strict gun laws in this city.

Let's assume for the moment that the District is wrong in enacting strict gun safety laws. When Congress passed the Home Rule Act, it gave the District the right to make this decision, right or wrong, a matter that should close this case, particularly today when Congress is demanding democracy worldwide. Even if the District is wrong, can the case seriously be made in America today that correcting what is wrong lies with this body, whose members cannot be held accountable for the consequences of repeal, will not be hammered for increases in gun violence, and will not attend a single funeral. The assertion that in undemocratically repealing our gun safety laws, Congress would be doing its constitutional duty would get us laughed off the world stage, particularly today, when the spread of democracy worldwide is a declared national priority. Since looking to the Constitution, Congress enacted the Home Rule Act to place precisely this matter in the hands of District officials and residents. We are left only with the Second Amendment, except that no local or federal court in considering this constitutional issue has ever found that D.C.'s gun safety laws violate the Second Amendment. Thus sponsors and co-sponsors are driven back to desiring baldly to override the democratically enacted laws of a local jurisdiction in the United States. Leave aside reconciling such action with national principles. I invite the co-sponsors to try their hand at defending the undemocratic repeal of our gun safety laws while rising to object when other nations ask for a pass on democracy.

No member of Congress has the right to usurp our right to protect ourselves and our kids by introducing more guns that could take the gun violence already here the next step to a free fire zone. No member of Congress has the right to encourage guns in homes when the overwhelming evidence from all the national data shows that guns in homes rarely are used to thwart intruders and are almost always used to kill those closest to us or in suicides. No member of Congress has the right to the odious provision this bill carries that bars the Mayor and Council from taking any action even to "discourage the private ownership or use of firearms." No member of Congress has a rebuttal to the hard data that show that one in five police officers is killed by the assault weapons that this bill would sanction to be sold in the nation's capital and no member can contest the tragic fact that more teens are killed by gunfire than by all diseases combined.

The most bankrupt rationale offered for this outrageous interference with our local laws is the existing gun violence in the District of Columbia. Let's hear the co-sponsors argue with a straight face that allowing guns in people's homes would reduce rather than increase gun violence here.

District officials and residents deserve credit and our appreciation for the significant reduction in gun killings and in crime that they have achieved and particularly for the sharp reduction in the number of children killed this year by gunfire. Our residents and officials deserve better than Congressional action that would inevitably frustrate your hard work and drive up these killings. Nine year old Donte Manning, shot and killed in Northwest in April and one year old Mianni Goodine, shot and killed in Southeast in January, deserve better than to have the memory of their young lives besmirched by the repeal of the District's gun safety laws in the very year in which they died by gunfire. Promising 15-year-old Myesha Lowe, shot and killed as a bystander while innocently eating fast food a year ago, whose mother, Francine Lowe, is here to testify today, deserves better, too.